

Tongass Land Management Plan Water Quality “Technical Aspects”

Water Quality Standards include three components:

- Designated uses (drinkable, fishable, swimmable...)
- Narrative (“no visible sheen”) or numeric (“<5 NTU”) criteria to protect uses
- Antidegradation policy

In Alaska:

- all uses apply everywhere (including water supply – drinking)
- the most stringent criteria applies (for turbidity it is drinking water criteria)

Antidegradation policy:

- Any existing use, and the water quality to protect that use, must be maintained
- The policy does not prohibit degradation: If water quality is better than the state’s criteria, the state may allow water quality to be degraded down to the level of the criteria, but only after a public finding that the lower water quality is necessary to support important economic and social development at that location. All technology-based requirements and/or BMPs must be met. Water quality cannot be degraded below the level of the criteria.
- Temporary water quality degradation is allowed (defined by state, usually in terms of days, and must not affect designated uses), as long as BMPs are in place.
- The exception is for Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRWs), which cannot be degraded (Alaska has not designated any)

Variances from water quality standards (antidegradation):

- Alaska procedures are clearly described in 18 AAC 70.200
- Public process
- Reclassification of specific water bodies requires a defensible Use Attainability Analysis (UAA) that demonstrates that the designated use does not exist and is not attainable. 25 water bodies in Alaska have been re-classified to remove designated uses.
- Short term variance is a time-limited UAA, allowing for time to evaluate the attainability of standards and/or development of technology

For waters classified by the state as public water supplies:

- Alaska Drinking Water Regulations (18 AAC 80) take precedence; activities in these catchments cannot have significant potential to pollute these water systems. This is a serious requirement based on protection of human health.
- The Forest Plan requires consultation with ADEC and public water supply system operators or owners prior to management activities to meet watershed protection needs on a case-by-case basis.

For waters with established drinking water use (but not classified by state):

- Alaska Drinking Water Regulations do not apply
- Antidegradation does apply